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STATE FOR EUR/NCE AND PM GLANCY

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SUBJECT: ON ROMANIA,S PARTICIPATION IN THE IRAQ COALITION

REF: STATE 54925

Classified By: CDA Mark Taplin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

**¶1.** (C) Summary: Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu is expected to push for a political decision by mid-May within the Supreme Council on National Defense (CSAT) to withdraw all Romanian troops from Iraq. The Prime Minister has asked Foreign Minister Cioroianu and Defense Minister Melescanu to take the lead in communicating a withdrawal decision to coalition allies. While some senior leaders, including the PM, might believe that simple press announcements constitute "consultations," we (and the UK) are pressing the GOR to engage in serious discussion at the command and operational levels. There are still sufficient professionals in the government to help steer a "soft landing" for Romania and coalition allies in Iraq. We cannot discount, however, additional moves to lock in a Romanian withdrawal. The PM eagerly wants to further weaken or embarrass suspended-President Basescu, who is the real target of Tariceanu,s eagerness to change Romania's approach in Iraq. End summary.

**¶2.** (C) POLMILOFF delivered reftel points to MFA on April 26, and asked that they be shared widely with all the appropriate offices which will be shaping their respective agencies, policies prior to the CSAT,s discussion of Romania,s troop commitments in Iraq.

**¶3.** (C) The government of Romania,s commitment to continue in the Iraq coalition has weakened considerably with the fashioning of the "ultra-minority" government of Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu. Nearly one year ago, President Basescu blocked Tariceanu,s first call for Romania to withdraw from Iraq. At that time, the PM did not have political control of the CSAT chaired by Basescu and dominated by his appointees. Since then, Tariceanu has purged the government of Basescu loyalists, expelled Basescu,s Democratic Party from the governing alliance, and helped engineer a vote that suspended Basescu from office for thirty days, with prospects he could be permanently removed from office following a national referendum. Consequently, the composition of the CSAT has shifted in Tariceanu,s favor, and Parliament is scrambling to expel other pro-Basescu elements in the government, including in the intelligence services, agencies which for the moment are still under direct presidential control. Sources in the MFA tell us that FM Cioroianu will/will confirm at the NATO Ministerial Conference in Oslo that Romania will keep its troop commitments to ISAF and Kosovo.

**¶4.** (C) The new Minister of Defense, Teodor Melescanu has advocated a thorough review of GOR overseas deployments,

citing the need to square GOR political ambitions with its resource constraints. Melescanu has stated he wants to bring down Romania's overseas troop contributions from the current 1700s down to as little as 700-800. In recent discussions with Deputy Eucom commander Ward, MOD Melescanu acknowledged that despite his skepticism regarding the efficacy of the Romanian troop contributions on the ground, they ultimately also constitute a strong political signal of GOR solidarity with the alliance and with the US. He hinted that he may be open to a significantly reduced Romanian presence in Iraq. Whether that scenario would be consistent with the PM's pledge to have Romanian troops home by Christmas remains to be seen.

¶5. (C) Tariceanu on April 23 said he would propose at the next meeting of the CSAT -- planned either for May 7 or for the week of May 14 -- the withdrawal of Romania's troops from Iraq. Tariceanu added the CSAT would likely approve his proposal but that the actual timetable would be based on consultations with coalition partners. Only two weeks earlier, Tariceanu referred to his proposal to withdraw Romanian troops from Iraq as a government priority. On March 26, he claimed Romania had fulfilled its military mission in Iraq, and that he would withdraw all Romanian military forces from Iraq by Christmas 2007.

¶6. (C) Melescanu - following the purge of Basescu supporters, including former Defense Minister Frunzaverde - announced on April 10 following a surprise weekend visit to Iraq, that he did not like what he saw in Iraq but troop withdrawals only would occur following consultations with coalition allies. Melescanu, too, added that Romania's withdrawal from Iraq was a priority.

¶7. (C) The Embassy has raised the question of Romania's commitment to MNF-I with all senior GOR officials, including President Basescu (prior to his suspension), Prime Minister Tariceanu, and the former and current Defense Ministers, as well as with the leader of the main opposition party, former Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) Mircea Geoana. Basescu and his then-Defense Minister Frunzaverde recognized in March that a withdrawal of the Romanian company with UNAMI in Basra was politically necessary, in recognition of the change in the President's political fortunes this year. Until now, Basescu's strategy had been to make incremental adjustments to Romanian forces in Iraq, but not to dilute Romania's overall contribution to the Iraq mission. For instance, the GOR reduction last August was tied specifically to the UK announcement that it was handing over Dhi Qar to Iraqi forces. Due to GOR troop logistic dependency on the UK, especially in MND-SE, that August 2006 decision was arguably operationally sound. This time, however, the March 29 CSAT agreed to withdraw the Romanian Army company from Basra only three days after PM Tariceanu called for all Romanian troops out of Iraq.

¶8. (C) Tariceanu and his Liberal allies do not yet have all their ducks lined up to "recalibrate" Romania's troop deployments. He still needs to hold parliamentary consultations, including with the PSD headed by Geoana who supports Tariceanu's moves against Basescu, but who also is ideologically closer to Basescu's trans-Atlanticism, and who might be concerned that Tariceanu is prepared to throw the baby out with the bath water. Tariceanu also needs to secure more politically reliable support within the CSAT, either by isolating or removing the pre-suspension Basescu holdovers. With the Parliament making moves to transfer Presidential prerogative appointments to the legislature, the clock is ticking on how quickly Tariceanu can consolidate control over the CSAT before Basescu's 30-day suspension ends (assuming that Parliament is unable to find a formula to keep Basescu suspended indefinitely).

¶9. (C) Another factor that may hinder Tariceanu's plans for complete withdrawal by Christmas, are the second tier professionals in the Foreign and Defense Ministries. We have been told that there was no prior consultation with either of those ministries before the Prime Minister's March 26

announcement - underscoring its domestic political intent. Some Foreign Ministry contacts referred to the situation as "embarrassing and frustrating." One source said the Prime Minister only consulted his inner circle within his National Liberal Party before making the announcement. Whether the professional bureaucracy will be able to steer the issue away from the political drama, and on a more constructive course is not clear. We can and will however continue to press for a deliberate and comprehensive consultation at the command, operational, and political levels.

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